

I had to wait this long to write my uncle a letter that he will never see:

I love you, Uncle Frank. I hope you are feeling better. Everything is fine with me. California is beautiful. Get well soon.

Things That Make You So Scared You Can't Swallow
And You Start To Cry And You Tell
Them That You'll Do Anything
If They'll Just Leave
You Alone

Three thousand down at Hollywood Park and into the book for six more. Two strangers are standing by your car, so you start to hitchhike the other way but they pick you up and turn down a dark street.

Spread-eagled in New Mexico: an arena of lights from eight Chevrolets with angel-hair upholstery. Your long blonde beard is already gone. Your balls are next.

Up against the wall in East St. Louis. Eight blacks, not kidding around. Old diddley-bops who never outgrew key-chains down to their knees, talking so much shit even they can't understand each other. One of them starts to cut the buttons off your shirt with a pearl-handled shiv.

Your wife comes out of the kitchen wiping her hands on a pink tea-towel. "It's perfect," she says, "I'm making a good dinner, you're having a drink, the baby is playing so sweet. I can't think of anything nicer."

Orientation Week

and a family of two is exploring the Student Union. Dad is all decked out in the shirt she bought with her own money. Joyce is wearing snug cut-offs and her freshman breasts stir as she walks.

Dad knows that all the boys plan to slip some LSD in her cocoa as soon as he is out of sight. He takes in the monsters, their hair down to there, a fuselage in every pair of pants.

Worse than he expected, certainly not the eunuchs and mild wethers that he hoped for. And where is The Jake Barnes Dormitory?

He sees them do it to her even as they stand by the car. Worse, he sees her ask for it, coaxing with her expensive teeth. Why can't he

Lock those vivid hips in her room?
Follow her everywhere, revolvers drawn?
Punch a few of those furry bastards in the chops?

So he does what he can -- lips to chaste brow, hand to bare arm saying,

Goodby, now. Be good.

Ever Since He Retired

Charley has paid a lot of attention to the four apartments he does not manage.

If there's one leaf on the little sidewalk he puts on his jacket, gets the broom out of the utility shed, stands over the offender for a full five seconds and then gets down to business.

Last week when he asked me for the seventh or eighth time to guess how old he was, he also wanted to know how my clothespin, the one that holds the out-going mail, was holding up.

"Okay, I guess."

"I've been thinking about those big manila envelopes you put out there."

Next day, of course, there was a new one so when I came home on Friday and he was sitting by his front door in his aluminum chair, I thanked him.

"Got the lawn all dolled up for the weekend," he said.

"Maybe the vacant lot from across the way will drop over and take ours out on the town. We might have a big hole right here until after the bars close."

Charley liked that, so we worked it into our 5:30 routine for a week or so.